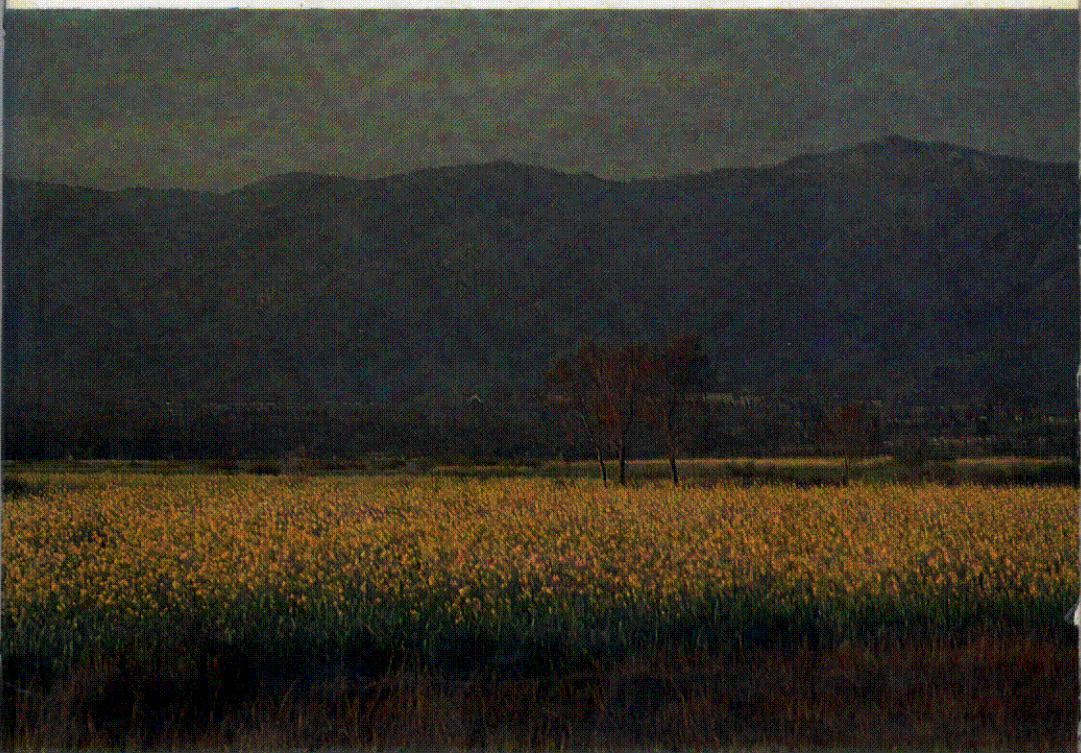
HIKING
AROUND ISLAMABAD

ASIAN STUDY GROUP

JULY 1992

FOREWORD

Most first time visitors to Islamabad are astonished at the beauty of the place: a city with wide streets and lush green trees and vegetation, set by a lake and a chain of green hills. Many residents of Islamabad know that the Margalla hills are not just fine to look at, they contain numerous walking trails, of varying lenghts, which provide an opportunity for exercise and fresh air and spectacular views. Along the way walkers can enjoy the local plants and wild flowers and often see interesting birds and other wildlife - particularly (I am told) if you are attracted to taking walks around dawn.

It helps to know where the best walks and hikes are to be found, because there is a great variety. Hans van Hoeflaken is a keen hiker who has devoted many hours to exploring the different tracks up the hills surrounding Islamabad.

For some years he has helped conduct hikes for members of the Asian Study Group. This organisation, as most residents of Islamabad will know, exists to enable Pakistanis and expatriates to learn more about different aspects of life in Pakistan, including culture, history and the natural environment. We also publish books by our members which contribute to the knowledge about Pakistan. When Hans van Hoeflaken was encouraged to write a hiking guide for the area he produced a slim booklet, full of useful maps and Information, in December 1988.

This was very popular. The first edition of 1000 copies was sold out in two and a half years. Hans has now produced an up to date revised version which takes into account the latest information on new hard surface and "jeepable" roads, building encroachments and stone quarries. I am sure that this will sell well too and give useful information and pleasure to many.

I need hardly say that one should be careful when enjoying the special beauty of the Margalla hills, not to damage the environment, not to disturb wildlife, nor pick wild flowers etc. Unfortunately some areas have suffered badly recently through fires, accidentally or perhaps in some cases deliberately started. We should obviously be careful about throwing away matches.

Happily, there exists in Islamabad a thriving organisation which lobbies to preserve the beauty of the Margalla hills. The Margallah Hills Society, established by a group of concerned citizens of Islamabad, is doing a laudable job in raising public awareness of the need to preserve the beauty of the hills by organising different activities, such as mass walks and tree planting, which attract a high level of participation from all sectors of society in Islamabad. They hold meetings, produce publications and are ready on occasion to take legal action to protect the integrity of the Margalla Hills National Park. In my view they deserve every support.

Part of my philosophy is to look for the best in places as well as people. Islamabad does not offer opera or sophisticated nightclubs, but it does provide an opportunity, almost unrivalled, to go deep into the countryside in less than an hour's drive and walk, often with magnificent views over the city itself and surrounding hills. There are myriads of good picnic places to be discovered. Occasionally, from the top of the hills on a very clear day, one can discern a distant line of snowy peaks towards Kashmir. Please use this booklet and explore: with your friends take advantage of what Islamabad has to offer.

Nicholas Barrington

(Sir Nicholas Barrington has been British High Commissioner in Pakistan since 1987, and president of the Asian Study Group since 1991)

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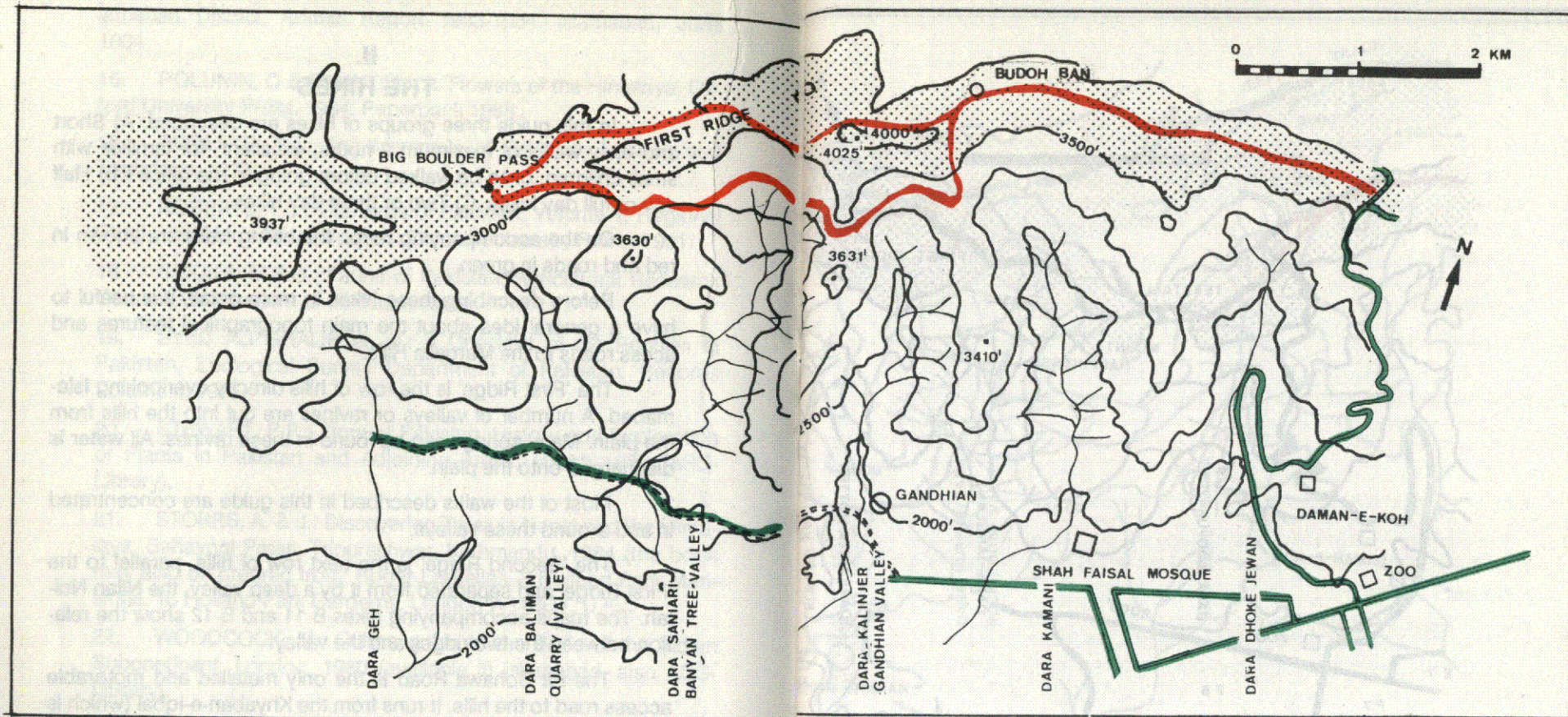
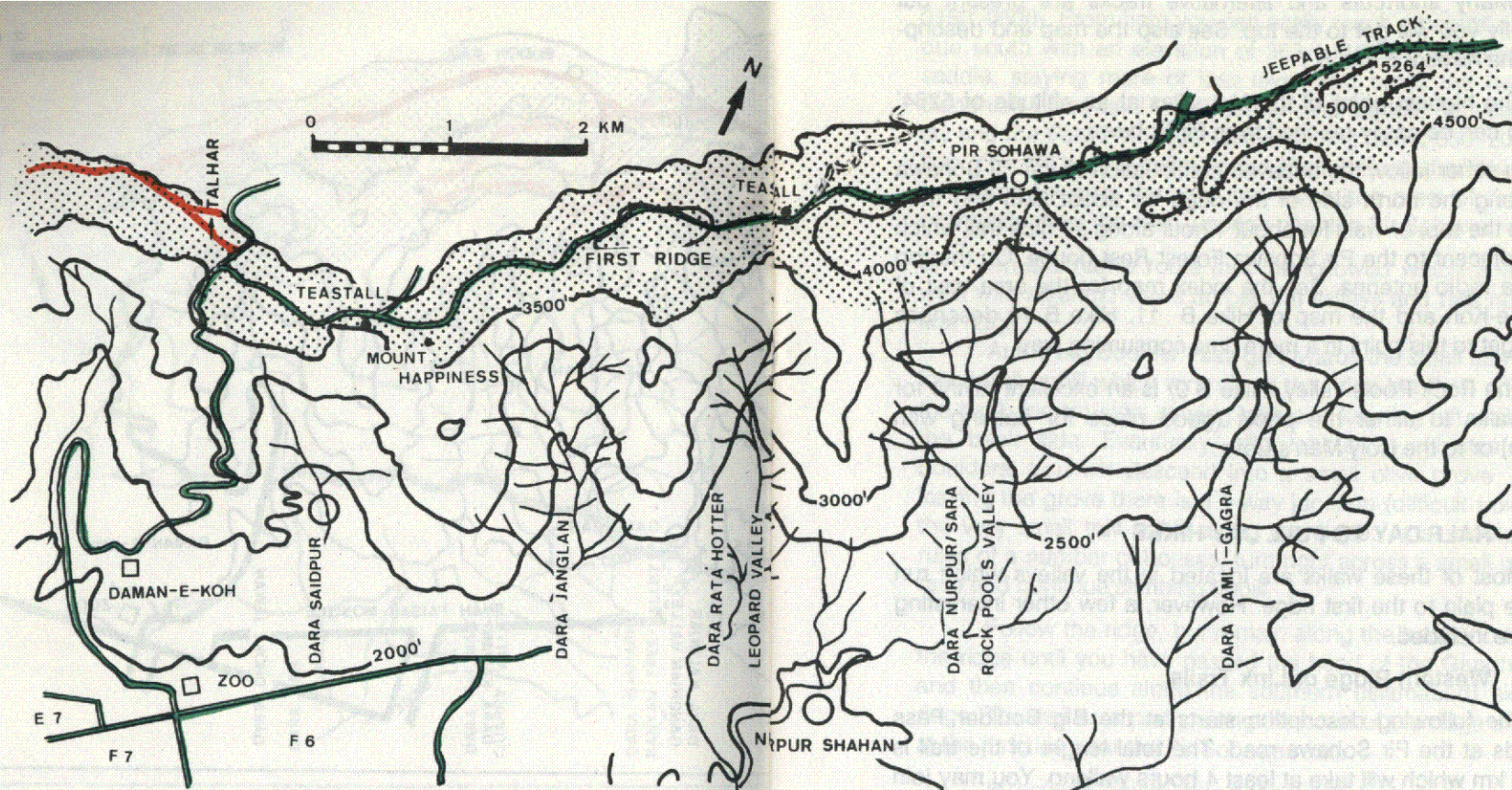

Index map of valleys west of Daman-e-Koh, also showing position of western ridge or link trails.

The 'official' Khyaban-e-Margala runs to the west along the foot of the hills from an intersection with the Khyaban-e-Iqbal where sector E-7 begins. Access to the various starting points of the hikes is given in the relevant descriptions.

A SHORT WALKS.

1. There is a trail from the Islamabad zoo (the point is called Marghzar) to Daman-e-Koh (viewpoint). See the map of hike B 5. The trail starts behind the zoo and zigzags steeply uphill to the viewpoint. It only takes about 20 minutes to walk up. The trail is quite popular and may be crowded on Fridays !

2. From Daman-e-Koh there are several hikes to the surrounding hill tops. They are all well maintained, have umbrella-shaped shades at the picnic spots, and are heavily used on Fridays. No special explanation is needed as you may see them from the parking area.

Index map of valleys east of Daman-e-Koh.

3. There is trail from the Pir Sohawa road near Daman-e-Koh to the 'Second Viewpoint'. The trail starts from the road near the kiosk (World Wildlife sign). It leads in about 20 minutes to a hilltop (with shade) from where you have an excellent view. The place does not draw large crowds.

4. Short walks along the Link Trail. Drive to the first intersection (Gojri Bari) along the Pir Sohawa road, 8.6 km from the Khyaban-e-Iqbal ('Margalla road'). Take the road to the left (which leads to the village Talhar) and go to the first bend, about 100 meter, and climb the trail on your left. In 20 minutes, after some zigzags, you will reach the ridge. There are several nice picnic

spots further along this trail, with views to both sides but especially into the Nilan Nullah, north of the ridge. See also the index map of the area west of Daman-e-Koh.

5. Mount Happiness or Garani (also called Meditation Point). This hilltop can be easily reached from the Pir Sohawa road. Start from the first teastall (called Chawki) after Daman-e-Koh and walk along the ridge to Mount Happiness (Garani) where you will see an unfinished picnic spot. There is a well-maintained trail from the Khyaban-e-Iqball ('Margalla road') in F-6/3 to the hill top with signs erected by the CDA (CDA trail 3). There is a good parking place just off the 'Margalla road'. Going down from the top can take an hour, but going uphill, starting from F-6/3 takes almost 2

hours. Many shortcuts and alternative tracks are present but eventually you will get to the top. See also the map and description of the hikes B 6 and B 7.

6. The highest point of the Margallas at an altitude of 5264' (1604m) can be easily reached from Pir Sohawa.

You can either follow the unpaved continuation of the Pir Sohawa road along the north side of the ridge for about 2km and then climb to the top, or walk for about 1 hour along a nice trail which starts adjacent to the Pir Sohawa Forest Rest house. On the top stands a radio antenna. See the index map for the area east of Daman-e-Koh and the map of Hike B 11. Hike B 10 describes how to get to this point in a more time consuming way.

7. The Rock Pools valley (Hike B 9) is an excellent ravine for short walks to either the pools (good place for bathing with childern) or to the Holy Man's Cave.

B. HALF DAY TO FULL DAY HIKES

Most of these walks are located in the valleys which run from the plain to the first ridge. However, a few other interesting walks are included.

1. Western Ridge or Link Trails.

The following description starts at the Big Boulder Pass and ends at the Pir Sohawa road. The total lenght of the trail is about 6 km which will take at least 4 hours walking. You may join the trail at the head of any of the 5 western valleys (Geh, Quarry, Banyan Tree, Gandhian and Faisal Mosque valleys) The index map plus the detail maps of these 5 valleys will give you the necessary cartographic coverage of the trails. There are two alternatives to start the hike at the Big Boulder Pass.

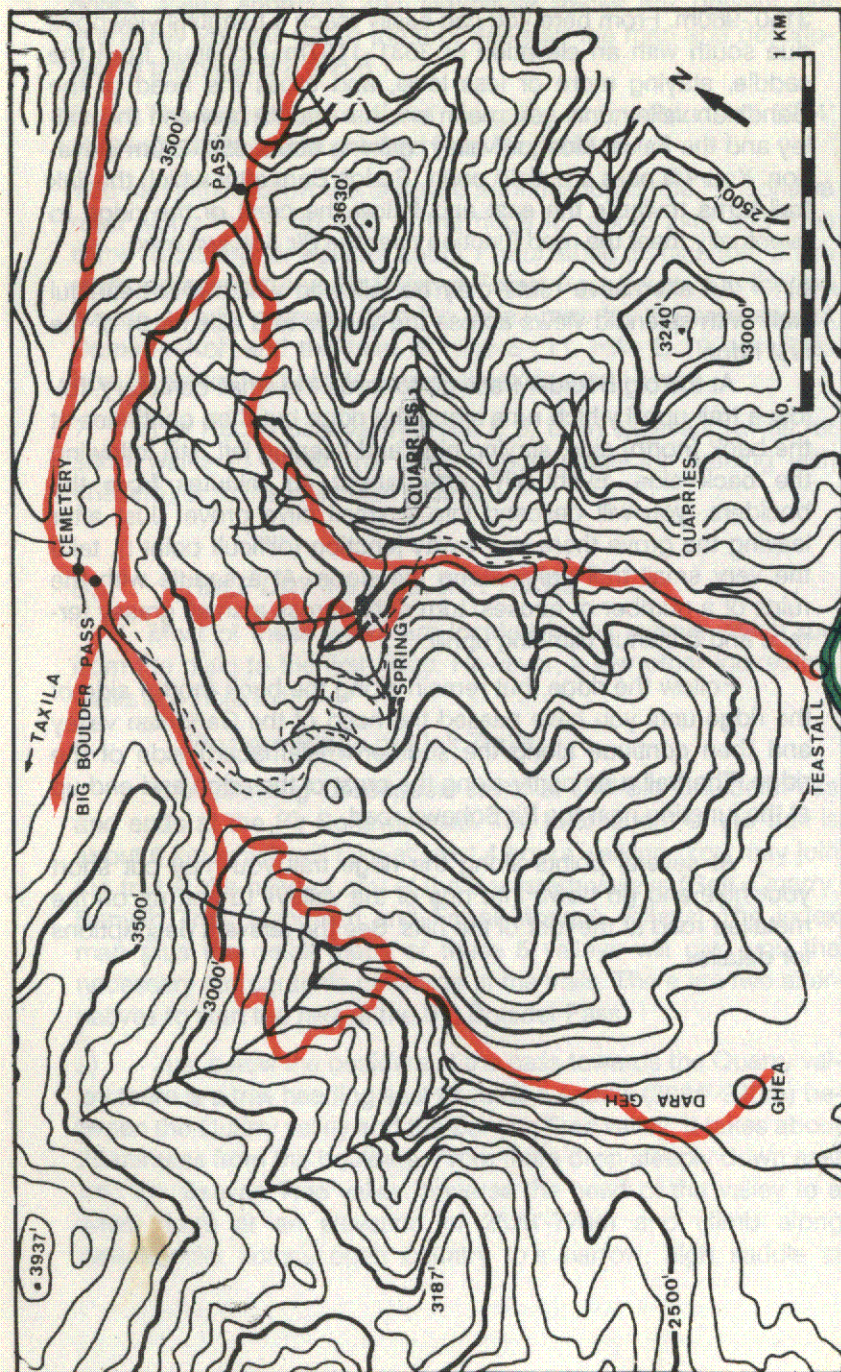
a) Just below the boulders at the pass towards the Quarry valley there is a trail heading east towards a saddle (3084'-940m) between the Quarry valley and the Banyan Tree valley. It takes about 25 minutes from the boulders. From there drop steeply down east into the Banyan Tree valley, traverse the head of the valley to a small ridge at an elevation of 2526'-770m and climb along switchbacks across open country to a narrow, high saddle at

3150'-960m. From here you can easily reach a beautiful viewpoint due south with an elevation of 3631'-1107m. Continue from the saddle, staying more or less level, and cross the head of the Gandhian valley until you reach another saddle between this valley and the Faisal Mosque valley, gaining about 650'-200m elevation. You will pass a buffalo pond (Budoh Ban) after which the link trail turns towards the east and follow the crest of the ridge to eventually meet the road junction near the Pir Sohawa road.

b) An alternative route may be followed which is a beautiful walk with splendid views across the valleys and hills north of the first ridge.

At the big Boulder Pass go towards the small cemetery, follow a trail uphill which runs along the ridge but then continues at the back (north) side, staying high and keeping left, still following the back side. Eventually, after about 4o minutes from the boulders, you will descend into a small olive grove. Just after leaving the grove there is a 4-way junction (difficult point !), take the very small trail uphill along the slope. At a saddle with the ruins of a number of houses, turn right across a small grassy terrace and continue climbing uphill.

Follow the ridge, but remain along the back (north) side of the ridge until you have passed the head of the Gandhian valley and then continue along the southern (Islamabad) side of the ridge. The trail runs partly along the crest of the ridge and end up at the junction near the Pir Sohawa road.

At several points along the ridge trail you may cut short your hike and go down into one of the valleys to end up on the metalled road at the foot of the hills. See the relevant descriptions for details.

Hike B-2: Dara Geh and Dara Baliman-Quarry valley.

2. Dara Geh and Quarry Valley-Dara Baliman

Walking distance from Ghea to the Bigg Boulder Pass : 2 3/4 km. - Walking time 1 1/2 hour.

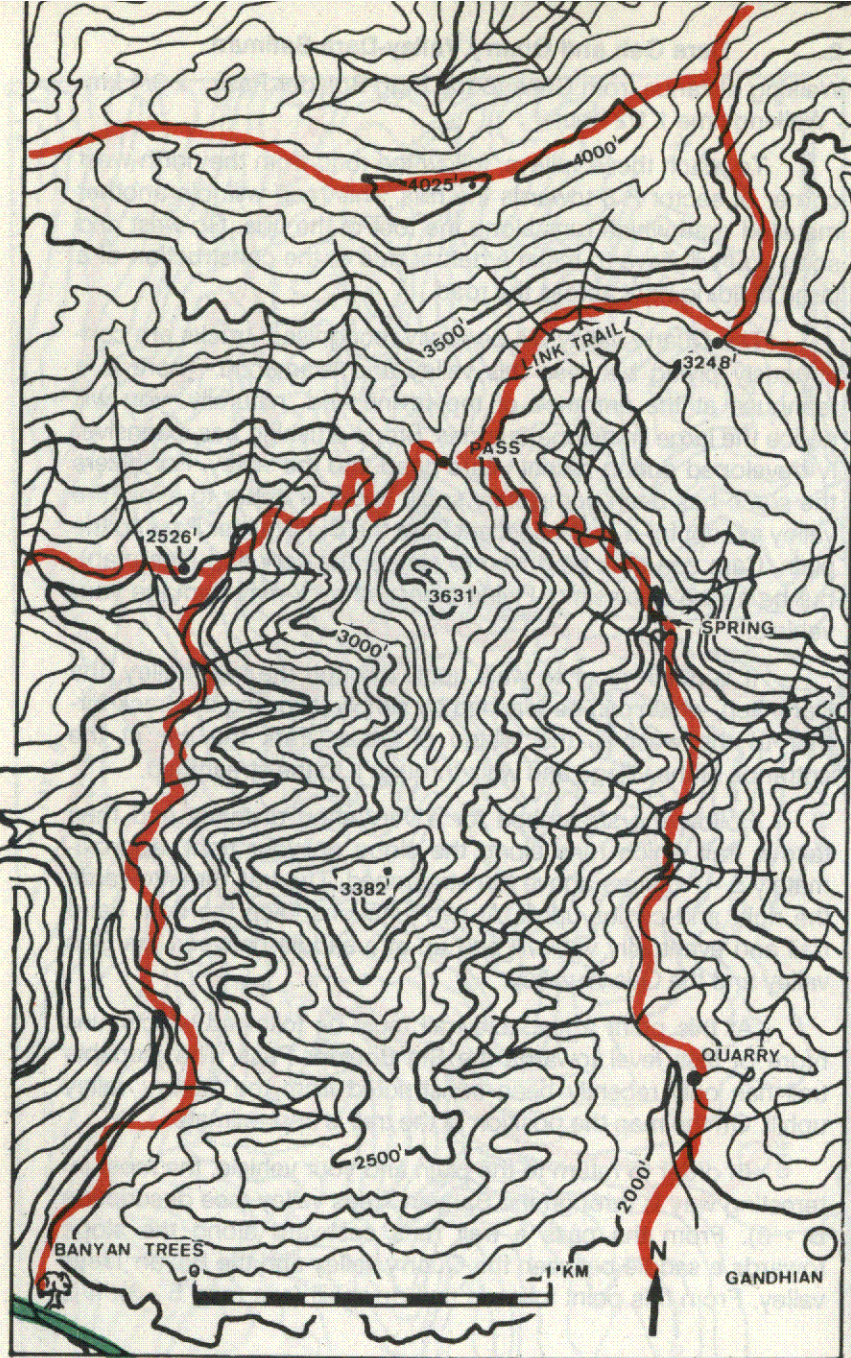
To reach these valleys, follow the road from the north-west corner of sector F 8 towards the hills. This road will join another metalled road which runs along the foot of the hills. Go west and soon you will have to make a detour due to the construction of a large building right across the road.

The Quarry valley will be easily recognised: trucks are continuously plying between this valley and Islamabad. There is a teahouse at the entrance of the ravine and, naturally, you will notice the large limestone quarries. Stone crushing has extensively developed during recent years deep into the valley. For hikers the place has been completely spoilt and it is better to avoid the valley except for a quick descent from the Big Boulder Pass to the plain. Cars can now be driven to almost the very end (see map), but be aware of blasting. Flying pieces of rock may damage your vehicle.

It is much nicer to walk uphill through the next valley, the Dara Geh, which can be reached by simply following the track further to the west till the village of Ghea. Park the car at the entrance of the village and walk through it to the streambed.

Follow the streambed for a very short distance and then take a trail which runs along the slope on your right, approximately 5 - 7 meters above the streambed. The trail turns towards the right and climbs uphill. At two junctions keep the right hand trail and eventually you will end up at a saddle between the Geh valley and the Quarry valley.

At this point a jeepable trail must be followed which runs more or less level towards the Big Boulder Pass. The jeepable trail has only recently been constructed from the Quarry valley uphill. On the map the position of the trail is approximate.

In order to return to the plain and your vehicle, the most interesting way is through the Banyan Trees valley (see description B - 3). From the pass a trail runs eastward along the slope towards a saddle between the Quarry valley and the Bayan Trees valley. From this point follow a trail downhill (see map B - 3). It is

Hike B-3: Dara Saniari-Banyan Tree valley and Dara Kalinjer- Gandhian valley.

at least an hours' walk from the Banyan trees to the village of Ghea. A much quicker return is through the Quarry valley.

3. Banyan Tree Valley-Dara Saniari and Gandhian Valley-Dara Kalinjer.

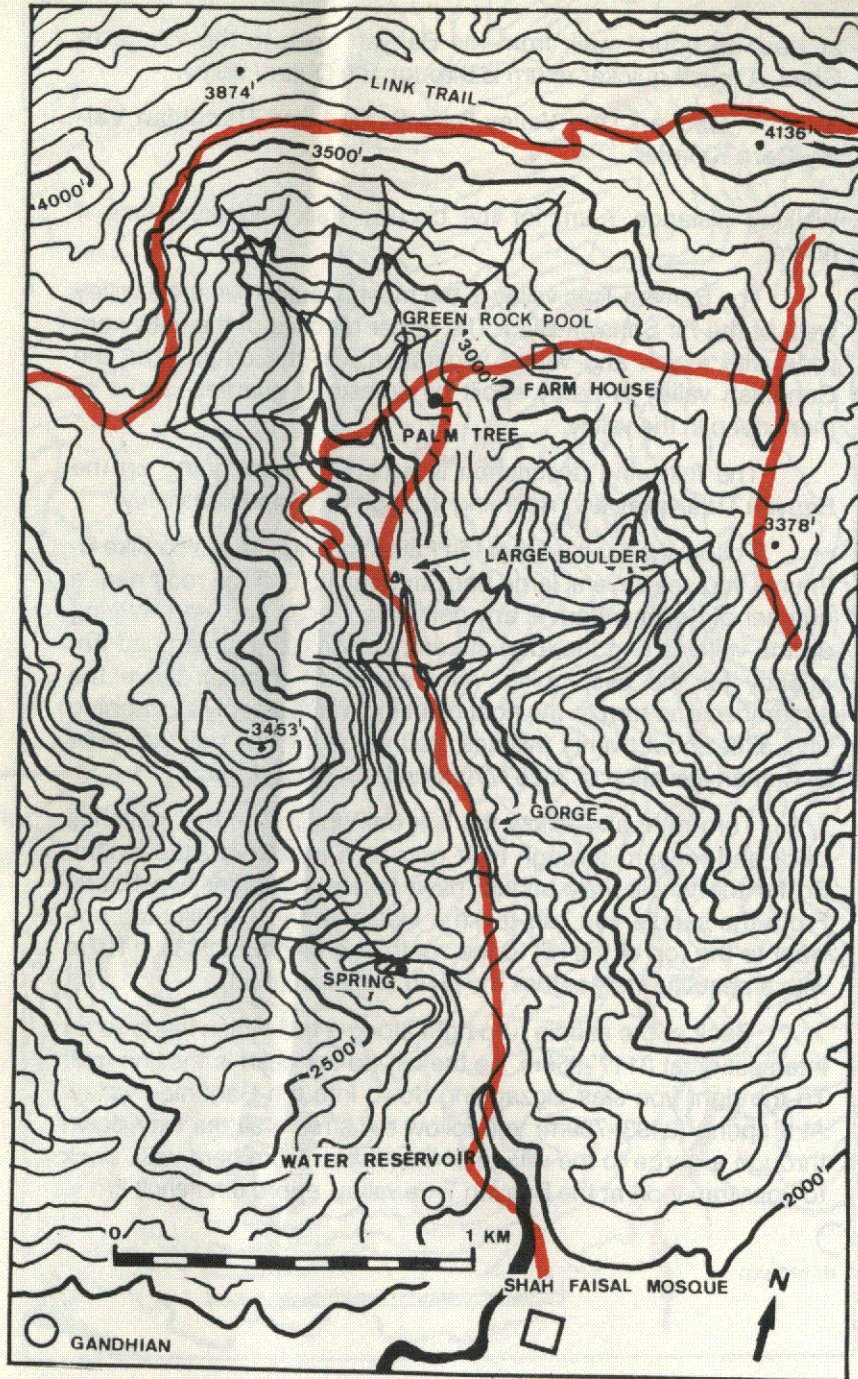
Walking distance 7 km for the circular walk - Walking time 4 hours.

The Banyan Tree valley is the most beautiful, unspoilt valley west of the Pir Sohawa road. The upper reaches of the valley are wide with a rich and varied vegetation. On the other hand the Gandhian valley is partly spoilt by limestone quarries, some of them deep in the valley.

The following description is a circular walk going up the Banyan Tree valley and returning through the Gandhian valley.

Follow the road west of the Faisal mosque (see also hike B-2) until you see several large Banyan trees just off the road near a number of houses. Park at any convenient point and start walking up the valley along the (dry) stream, crossing the streambed frequently for the best going. After about 40 minutes leave the streambed and turn to the right climbing a trail steeply zigzagging until after about twenty minutes, you reach the link trail (see hike B-1) at an elevation of 2526'-770m under a small ridge.

Turn right and follow the link trail uphill. The trail switches back and forward through high gras to a saddle at 3150'-960m. So far the whole walk should have taken just under two hours. From the saddle you can make a nice side trip (20 minutes one way) to the top of the hill to the south at a height of 3631'-1107m with a beautiful view across the plain and Islamabad.

Back at the saddle turn right along a trail which leads to an intersection at 3117'-950m. To the left (to the east) is the link trail. To the right you start zigzagging down into the Gandhian valley. At a spring (2493'-760m) you follow the stream all the way down through a gorge to the village of Gandhian. From here walk back to your transport at the Banyan Tree valley, approximately 2 km.

Hike B-4: Dara Kamani-Faisal Mosque valley.

4. Faisal Mosque Valley-Dara Kamani

Walking distance 3 km to the saddle - Walking time 2 hours.

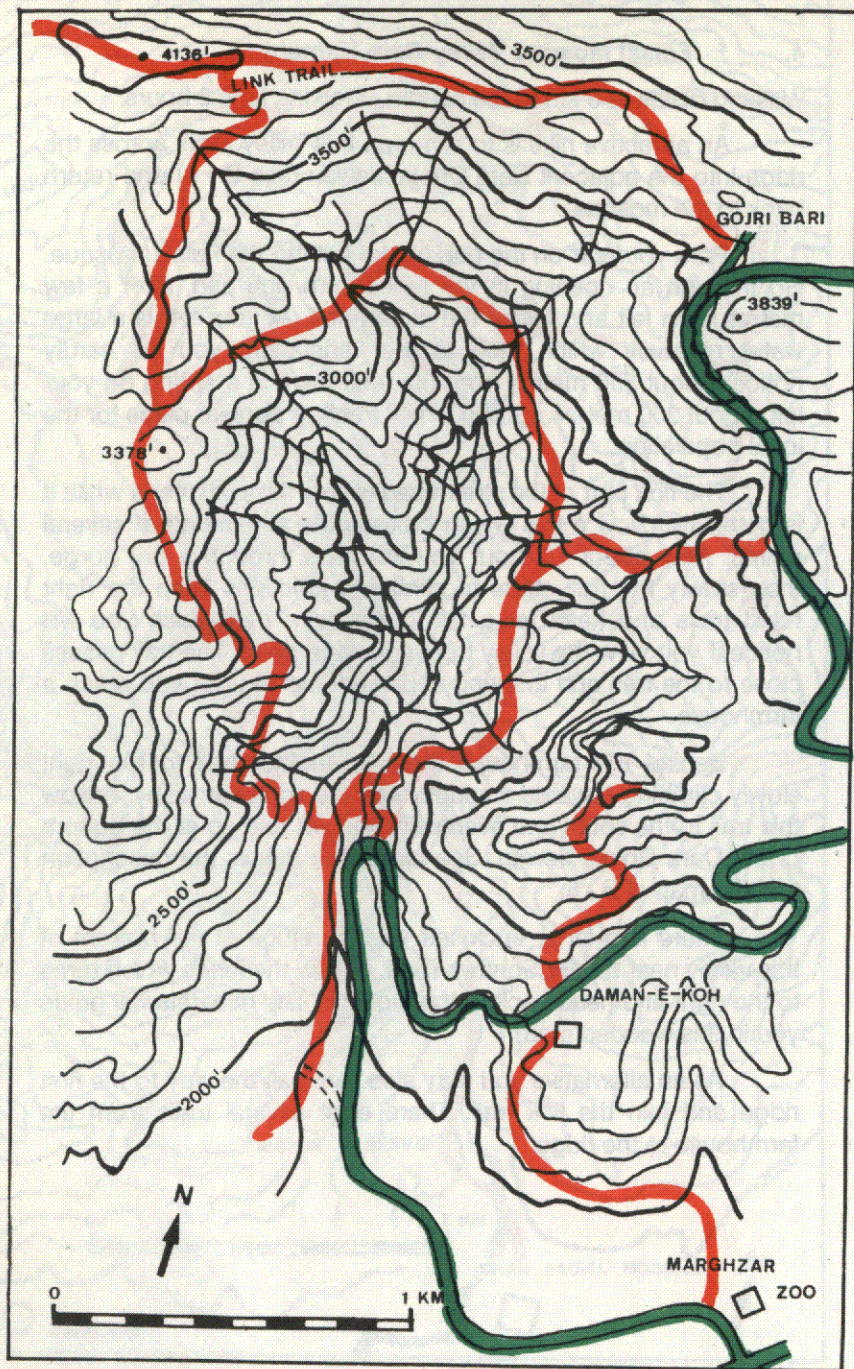
An attractive hike is to climb up this valley, walk across the ridge into the adjacent Dara Dhoke Jewan (see B - 5) and return back to the mosque.

Park your car on the parking lot behind the Faisal mosque. Go through an opening in the fence, turn righ and, after a few metres, turn left and follow the streambed. At your left is a large water reservoir which, due to the vegetation, you wil hardly notice. About 550 metres from the tank there is a spring on your left, about 300 metres uphill (Domali Pani), a popular place for the local population.

The first part of the streambed is very flat and after a while it is better to follow a trail which crosses the streambed at several points. After about 1/2 hour you will pass through a dry gorge, then slowly the trail starts to climb. At junctions keep the right hand trails and head for a tall lonely palm tree which you will notice if you view the valley from a vintage point. The trail passes close to the tree and a spring and winds uphill untill you reach a farmhouse.

Behind the farmhouse there is another trail to the right slowly climbing towards a saddle with the adjacent valley. Follow this trail to the south and eventually you will end up at the bottom of the Dara Dhoke Jewan. See for further details the description and the map of B - 5.

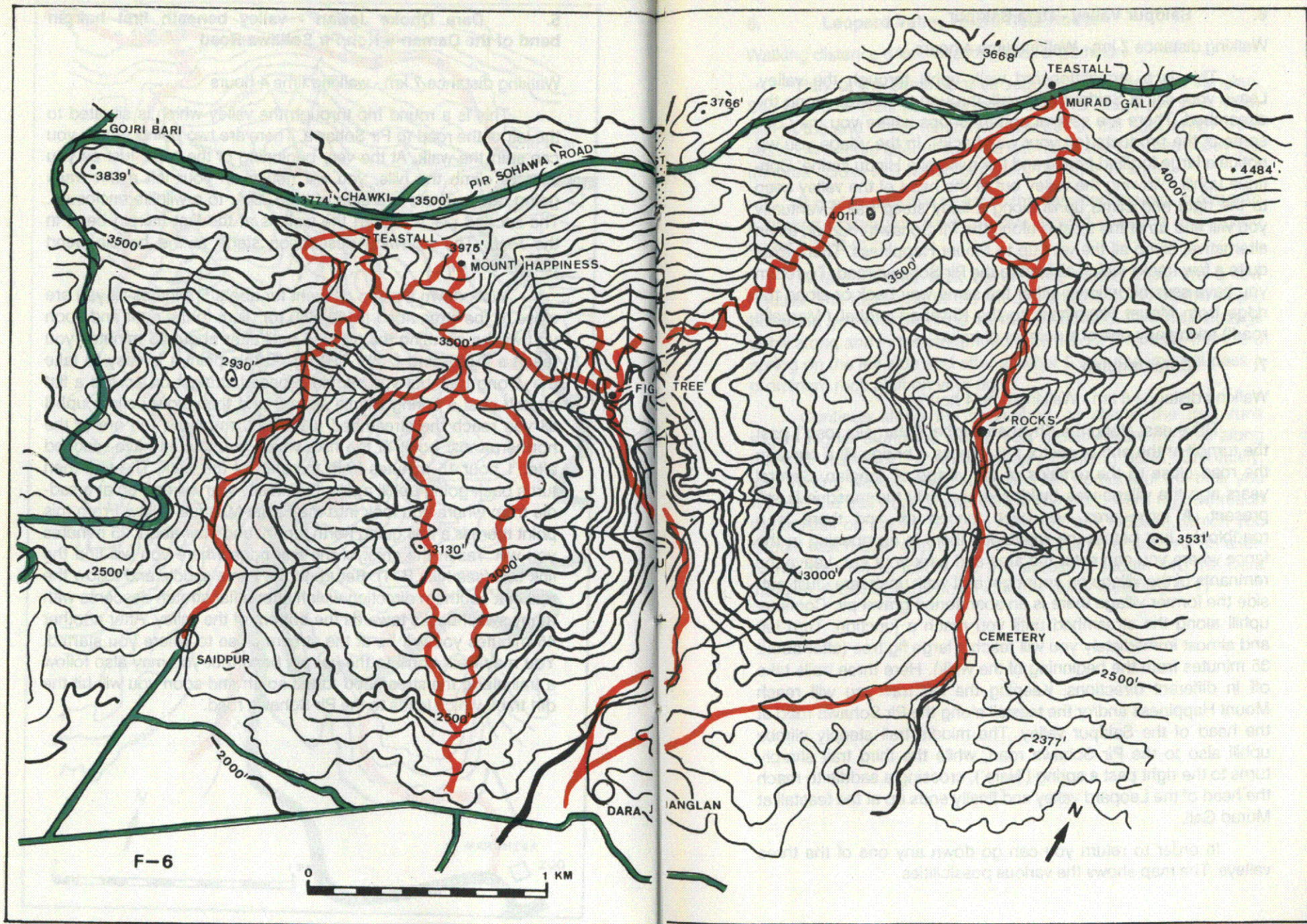
There is a large enclosed wildlife refuge at the bottom of this valley near the Pir Sohawa road. Follow the fence which turns to the right and head back to the mosque. The minarets will guide you in this wooded area.

As an alternative you may also climb all the way to the first ridge and join the link trail. There exist several trails from the farmhouse to the ridge.

Hike B-5: Dara Dhoke Jewan-valley beneath first hairpin bend of the Daman-e-Koh/Pir Sohawa road.

5. Dara Dhoke Jewan - valley beneath first hairpin bend of the Daman-e-Koh/Pir Sohawa Road

Walking distance 7 km - walking time 4 hours

This is a round trip through the valley which is situated to the left of the road to Pir Sohawa. There are two points where you can start the walk. At the very beginning of the road, just as you start to climb the hills, you will notice on your left a dirt track going down. There is a sign of the C.D.A. to a wildlife enclosure. The second place to start the walk is at the first hairpin bend in the road. The following description starts at the hairpin bend (2264'- 690 m).

Walk down a steep descent for about 5 minutes till you are close to the streambed (2183'-650 m). Turn to the right and soon you will be climbing the hill side until after about 25 minutes you reach a T-crossing (2559'-780 m). At this point it is easy to take the wrong trail, but you should proceed straight on across a flat stretch past a spring (Ranja spring) and then slowly climb uphill till you reach the streambed (2953'-900 m). Now you are at the northern-most point of the hike which you should have reached after 1 hour 15 minutes from the start of the walk. The trail then turns back going uphill again. Eventually you will end up at a saddle from where you look into the Faisal Mosque valley. From this point there is a trail going north, uphill, and after about 25 minutes you will reach the crest of the first ridge where you will find the link trail (see hike B- 1). Return to the same saddle and follow the trail in a southern direction which after a flat stretch descents with many switchbacks towards the bottom of the valley. After another 45 minutes you will be at the stream close to where you started. You may walk uphill to the hairpin bend, but you may also follow a trail along the streambed to the south and soon you will hit the dirt track which leads to the Pir Sohawa road.

Hikes B-6, B-7 and B-8: Dara Saidpur-Saidpur valley, Dara Janglan and Dara Rata Hotter-Leopard valley.

6. Saidpur Valley - Dara Saidpur

Walking distance 7 km - Walking time 4 hours.

This is a straightforward walk uphill through the valley. Leave your car at Saidpur and walk through the village along the streambed. There are several pottery shops where you may buy some of the products (on your way back!). In the village you will notice a large fortified house and the ruins of a Hindu shrine. Continue uphill following the valley but at the head of the valley keep to the right and climb uphill along a fairly steep trail. Eventually you will end up at the teastall along the Pir Sohawa road or, as an alternative, climb all the way up to Mount Happiness. There exist quite a few tracks which all lead to the Pir Sohawa road. To return you have several options: either the same way back or along the ridge from Mount Happiness to the Khyaban-e-Iqbal ('Margalla road') taking any one of a number of trails.

7. Dara Janglan

Walking distance 8 km - Walking time 4 hours.

Drive east along the Khyaban-e-Iqbal ('Margalla road') past the turnoff at the end of sector F-6, across a bridge till a curve in the road close to the remains of the village of Janglan. Several years ago the village was bulldozed and only the mosque is still present. A large area has been fenced off and there is a roadblock. Just before the roadblock there is an opening in the fence where you can enter the area and park your car. Leave the remnants of the village on your right and walk upstream. Just outside the former village there is an abandoned gravel pit. Continue uphill along the streambed until you reach a junction. Turn left and almost immediately you will reach a large fig tree (after about 35 minutes from the beginning of the walk). Here three trails take off in different directions. Keeping the left trail you will reach Mount Happiness and/or the teastall along the Pir Sohawa road at the head of the Saidpur valley. The middle trail steeply climbs uphill also to the Pir Sohawa road, while the third trail sharply turns to the right past a spring ('Nara'), crossing a saddle to reach the head of the Leopard valley and finally ends up at the teastall at Murad Gali.

In order to return you can go down any one of the three valleys. The map shows the various possibilities.

8. Leopard Valley - Dara Rata Hotter

Walking distance 6 km - Walking time 3 1/2 hours

Park at the same spot as suggested for the Dara Janglan. See hike B-7. Walk past the remains of the village (on your right) and at the end of the ruins there is a trail to the right which crosses a low saddle after which you will reach the Leopard valley (25 minutes), close to a walled cemetery (a shrine of a pir).

It is also possible to get to the cemetery by car, but due to a broken bridge you have to drive around. See the description under hike B-9.

A few minutes walk beyond the shrine there are a few houses. The trail starts to the left of the fields along the hill slope, but soon you will be close to the streambed. The trail zigzags uphill along and in the streambed. After about 5 minutes there is a spring on the left side and after another 5 minutes you will pass a prominent rock bluff on your right.

Continue along the streambed, at places the traill runs slighly higher along the slope. You should follow the trail along the main valley to the north, steeply climbing uphill. Eventually, after having walked along steep and flat portions of the trail, you will join the trail from Murad Gali to the west. Turn right to reach the teastall on the Pir Sohawa road (3773' - 1150 m), which you should reach after approx. 1 1/2 hour from the start. As an alternative, turn left to follow the trail across a saddle into the Dara Janglan. A trail zigzags down into this valley (see hike B- 7).

9. Rock Pools Valley - Dara Nurpur/Sara

Walking distance 8 km (round trip) - Walking time 4 hours

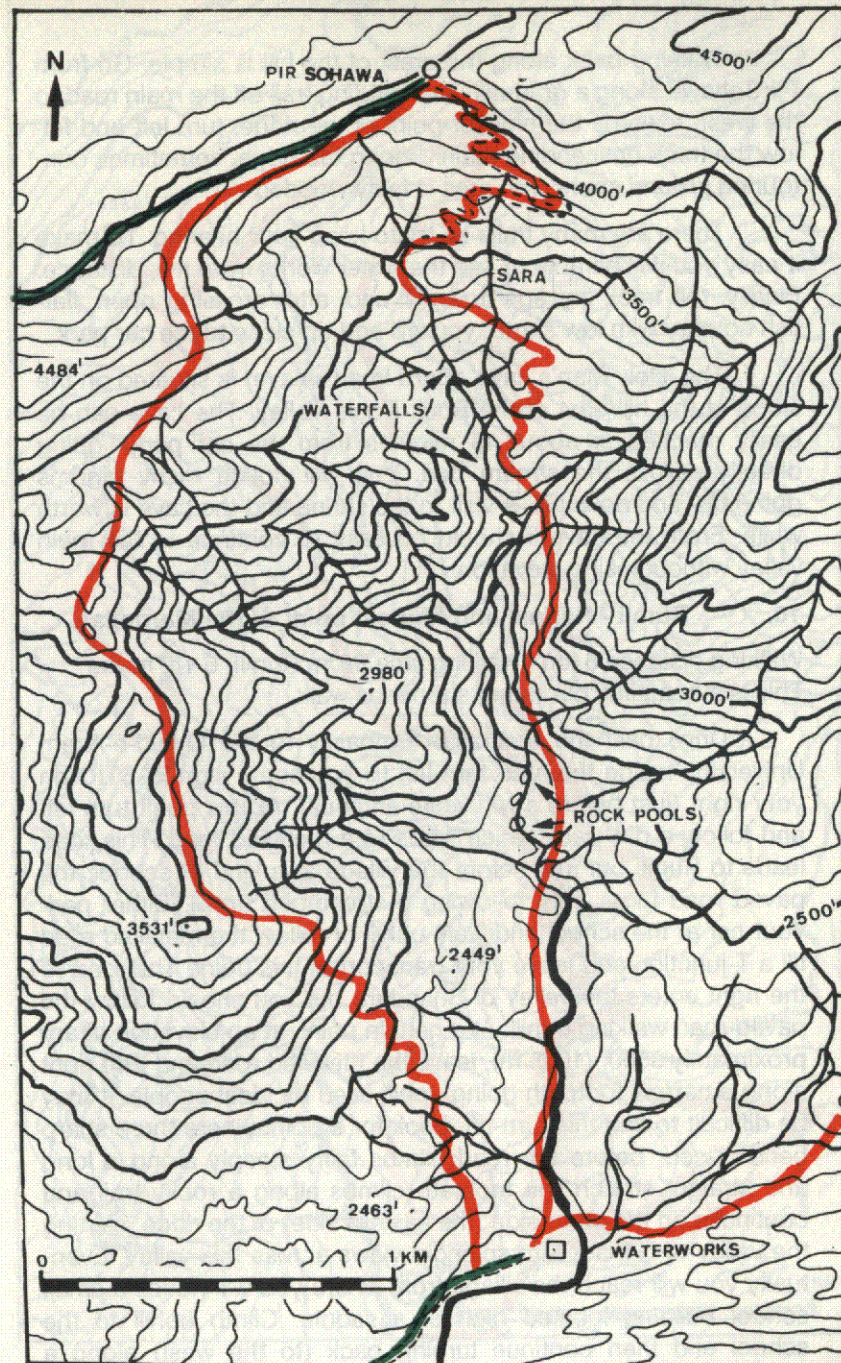
This hike is described as a round trip, walking up through the valley and back along the crest of the hills west of the valley.

The hike starts at a good parking place near the Mandiala water works north of Nurpur Shahan. It can be reached by following the road which passes the Canadian Embassy (Ispahani Road). The road turns left and runs past a number of government apartment buildings. At a junction continue straight on (to the right the road leads to the village of Nurpur Shahan).

After crossing a bridge the paved road turns to the right but at this point you should follow a dirt track which after a few minutes joins a metalled road. Follow this road towards the hills and within 10 minutes you will reach the water works.

This is also a good access road into the Leopard Valley - Dara Rata Hotter. After driving for a few minutes along the metalled road there is an unpaved track to the left which leads into this valley.

Leave the car and walk up the valley along the well marked track. Near a small village you can either walk through it (between walls) or turn right before reaching it. Be careful of the local dogs! In both cases you must then cross the stream bed. The trail will go slightly uphill and the stream will be on your left. The track is marked with blue arrows. After about 35-40 minutes from the start of the walk you will be able to see in the streambed below several rock pools and a spring (Barooti spring). The place can be reached along a narrow path. An excellent spot for bathing, especially for children !

Follow the main track further uphill which is becoming rocky, leaving the streambed far below. On your left you will notice a waterfall. The track zigzags through thick shrub uphill, skirting a secong (and larger) waterfall. Eventually you will reach a flat area with fields, a few inhabited houses, ruins and an old fig tree. This is the village called Sara. At this place a jeepable track starts near the streambed. Follow this track which is zigzagging uphill and, after a flat stretch, you will reach the road at Pir Sohawa.

Hike B-9: Dara Nurpur/Sara-Rock pools valley.

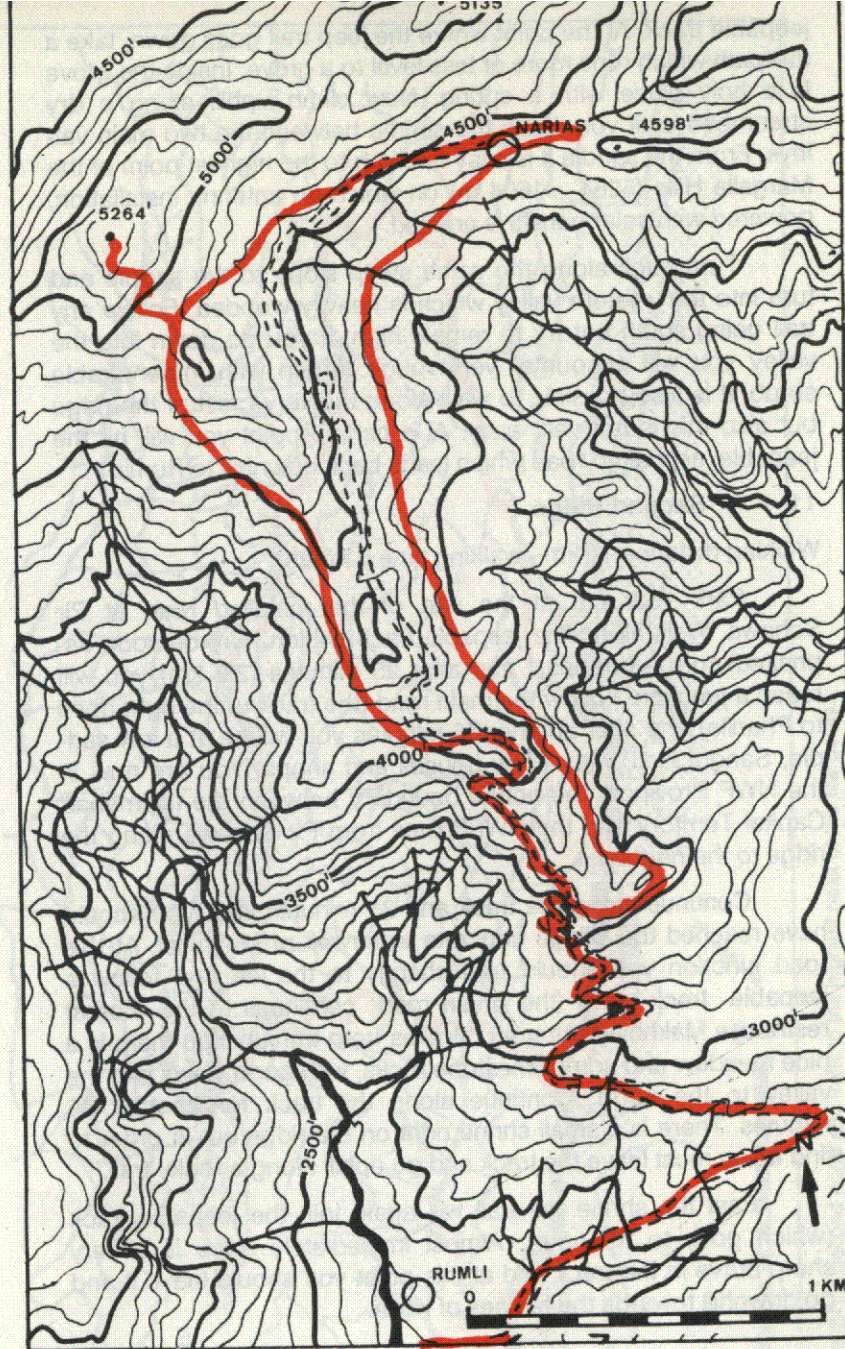
Walking back along the crest of the hill is simple. Go from Pir Sohawa along a gradually descending trail off the main road to the west, towards the highest point of the ridge, turn left and follow the track descending mainly along the ridge, sometimes contouring around spurs. The area is fairly wooded.

There are many trails so try to keep your bearing. To make it easy you will be able to see the water works from this distance. Finally, the track zigzags downhill and, after crossing open, flattish country with low shrub, you will end up close to the car park.

The 'Holy Man's cave' (Barri Iman's cave) is situated on the slope of the hill east of the Rock Pools Valley. The cave can be easily reached in about 45 minutes from the car park going directly across the stream bed. You will notice many pigrims going up- and downhill. A visit to the shrine and the cave is worth while. From the cave it should be easy to continue to the main valley without losing elevation.

10. Rumli - Narias, and highest point of the Margallas.

Walking distance 8 km - walking time (from Rumli) 6 1/2 hours
This is a beautiful, but rather streneous walk.

Drive past the Australian Embassy to the Quaid-e-Azam University. Inside the arch turn left till you see a sign PASTIC on your right (just before a red/white antenna). At this point turn left and follow a dirt track which leads to a metalled road. This road leads to Rumli but just before the village at a kind of school, the paved road turns right following a streambed uphill. Either park your car at the school and walk uphill or follow the metalled road till a T-junction and leave your transport at this point. The road to the right enters the valley of Shahdara but you should follow the paved road walking uphill. At a certain point, at an elevation of approximately 3500' (1065 m), leave the metalled road and turn right along a narrow footpath going uphill used by local people. It may be difficult to find this turn-off. Look for a point where three sharp bends occur before the road climbs fairly steeply along a long and straight stretch.The footpath climbs along a rocky trail and continues on the other side (the eastern side) of the ridge, skirting the valley of Narias, with splendid views across this valley. Eventually you will reach the village from where you will notice a small school building located high at a saddle. Climb uphill to the school and then continue turning back (to the west) along a

Hike B-10: Rumli and Narias, and highest point of the Margallas.

jeepable track. At the point where the jeep trail goes down, take a footpath which runs more or less level to a grove. Inside the grove is a holy place with a spring. Now climb uphill along a dry streambed until you reach the saddle between the two main valleys. From the saddle it is easy to climb to the highest point of the Margalla Hills (5264' - 1604 m) on which an antenna installation, powered with solar panels is erected.

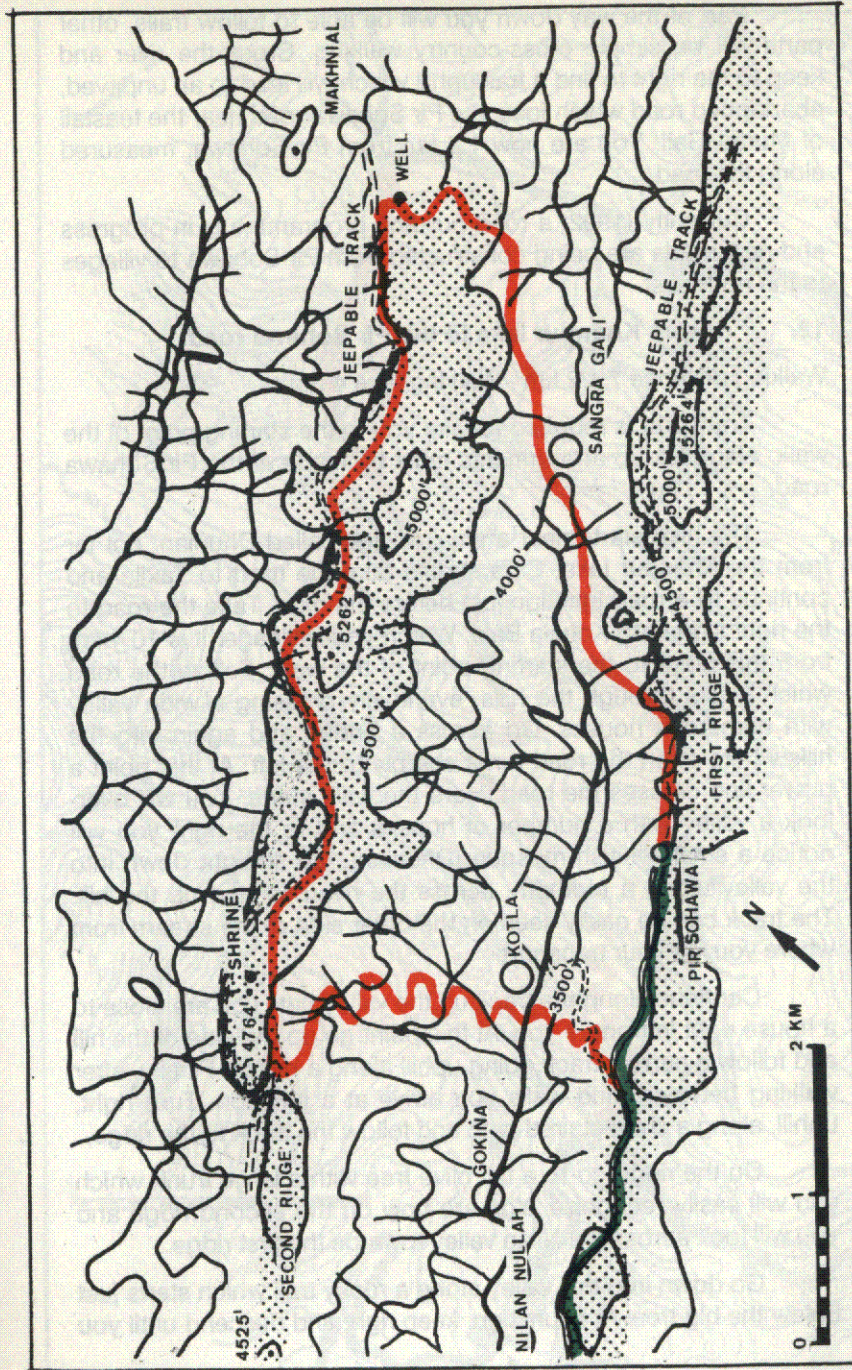
Turn back along the same steep slope to the saddle and turn into the western valley which is heavily wooded. Follow any trail going south but try to remain high. If you go down into the valley you will encounter very rough terrain with impenetrable shrub. It is also possible to walk along the very crest of the ridge but also this is not very easy. At a certain point you will hit the jeepable, asphalted road which leads back downhill to Rumli.

11. Second Ridge

Walking distance 11 km - walking time 6 hours

Park your car at the end of the metalled road at Pir Sohawa. Walk along the jeepable track (which may be soon asphalted) to the northeast and after 25 minutes (2.2 km) you will reach a junction. Follow the main road (the track to the right goes to Pharilla) and after another 35 minutes you will be at a low saddle, Sangra Gali, with a few houses and shops. You are now in the NWF Province: the actual boundary between the Islamabad Capital Territory and the NWFP runs from Pir Sohawa along the ridge to the northeast.

Continue along the track and 35 minutes later you should have reached the village concrete waterwell of Makhnial. At this road junction you should turn sharply to the left and follow a jeepable track uphill (the main road continues to the Forest resthouse Makhnial). After 40 minutes from the junction there is a nice meadow and some limestone rocks, with good views into the valley to the north. Continue along the track for another 45 minutes. There is a small shrine right on the ridge but in order to find it you must leave the track and go uphill along a rocky trail.

Past the shrine the trail will again join the jeepable track (which goes to Khanpur). Almost immediately there is a very sharp curve in the track and at this point you should leave it and go downhill towards the houses of Kotla.

Hike B-11: Second ridge and trails to the highest peak of the Margallas.

Part of the way down you will be able to follow trails, other parts will be simple cross-country walking. Cross the river and keep to the right to find a trail uphill which will lead to an unpaved, abandoned road which joins the Pir Sohawa road near the teastall of Murad Gali. You are now 1.8 km from Pir Sohawa, measured along the road.

Currently (1992) a road building programme is in progress and new roads are being constructed from Pir Sohawa to villages to the northeast.

12. From Khanpur lake to the Pir Sohawa road

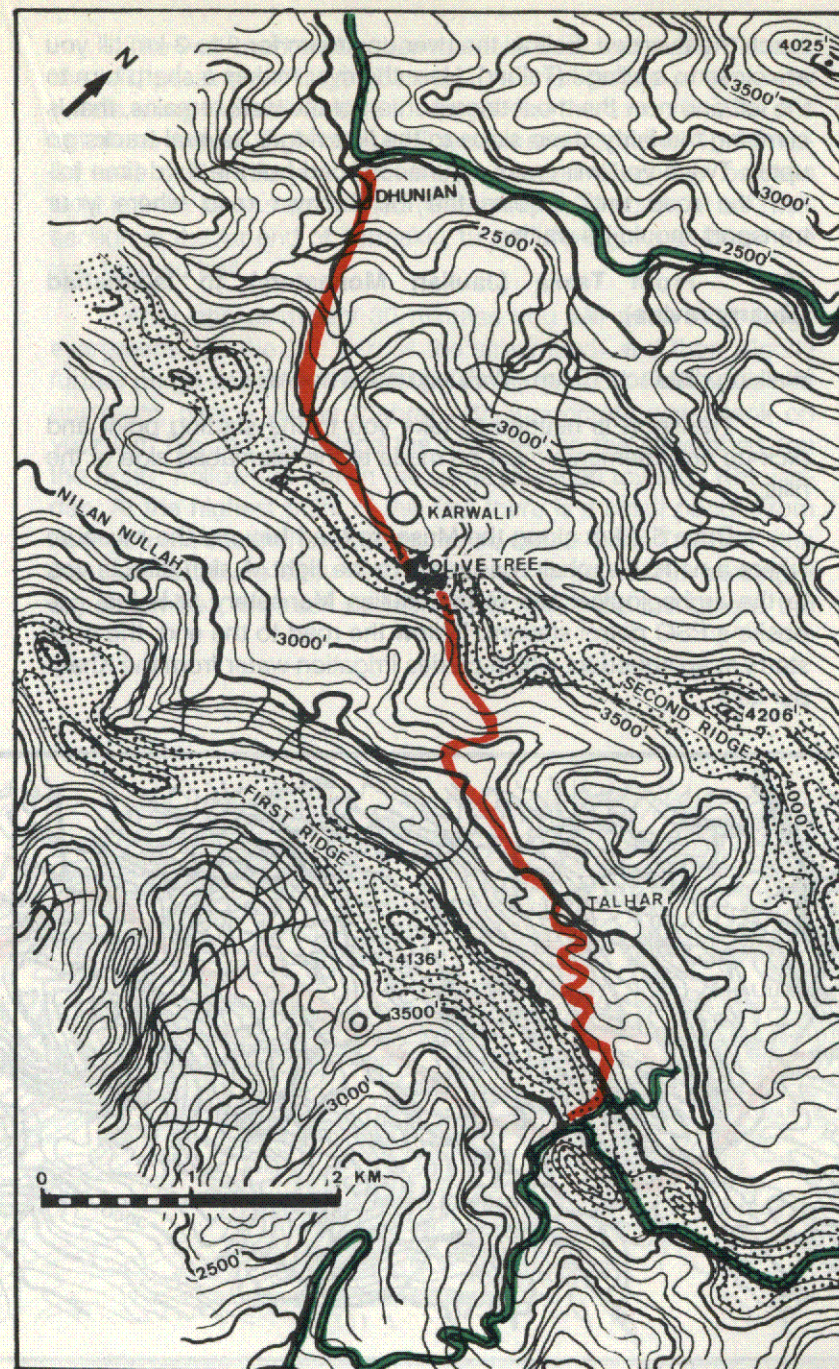
Walking distance 7 1/2 km - Walking time 4 hours

Transport is required to take you to the starting point of the walk. Also pick-up arrangments must be made at the Pir Sohawa road.

The hike starts near a small village called Dhunian, not far from the Khanpur lake. Cars should take the road to Taxila and continue till a road junction just before the dam. Take the road to the right signed to Kohala Bala. Watch your mileage: it is 10.4 km from this point to the starting point of the walk. Follow the road which twists through the hills, eventually crossing a wide valley with numerous houses. Go across a bridge and again into the hills where soon the road turns sharply to the left. At this point a power line crosses the road. Here the walk starts. You will overlook a valley with a number of houses and to the right you will notice a small whitish mosque (Dhunian). Go straight down into the valley along a footpath, across the riverbed and up the hill. The track can be easily seen on the other side of the stream from where you left your transport.

Continue along the track up the valley until you are close to a house right in front of you. At this point go up the side of the hill and follow a narrow track going uphill along a nullah. Finally, after walking between mud walls you arrive at a junction. Turn right, uphill, along a short staired path and follow the track to the ridge.

On the ridge go to a tall olive tree with a large trunk which you will easily recognize. You are now on the second ridge and you will look across the Nilan valley towards the first ridge.

Go down into this valley along a rocky trail which starts just below the big tree. At a junction, keep right and descend until you

Hike B-12: from Khanpur lake to Pir Sohawa road.

reach the riverbed. Follow the river upstream for 2 to 3 km till you are close to a village (Talhar). Here the river makes a sharp turn to the left and now the most tiring portion of the walk remains, that is climbing the fairly steep slope to the first ridge. Several tracks go uphill. Twice you will cross a surfaced road but the third time follow the road until it joins the Pir Sohawa road where your transport should be waiting.

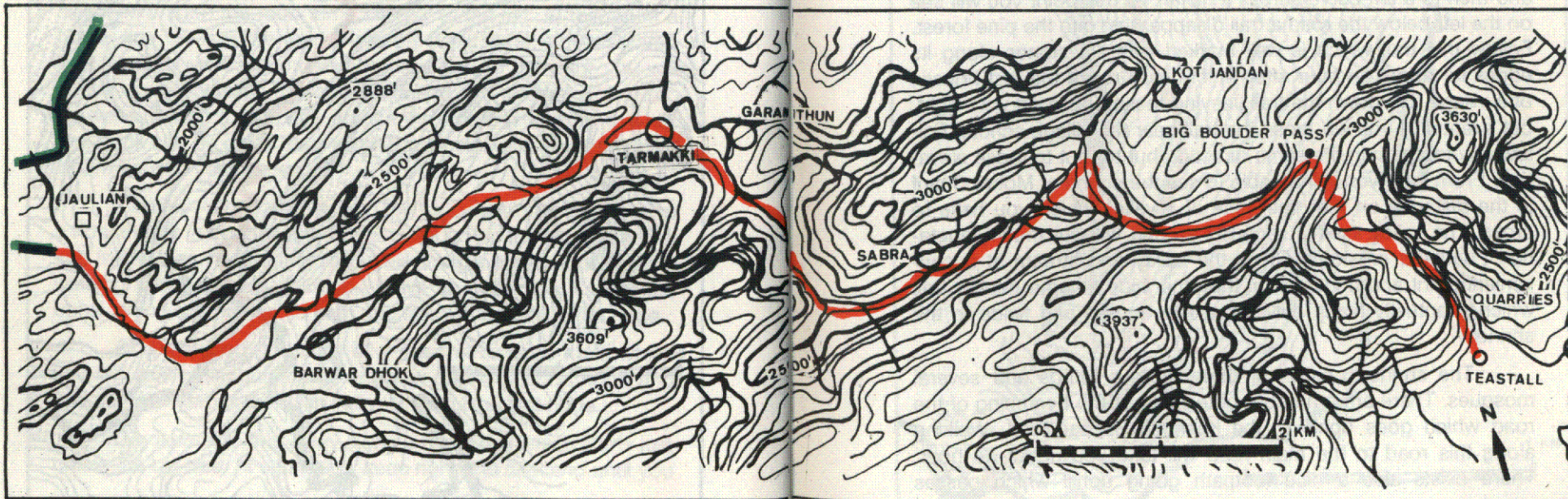
13. From Taxila (Jaulian Monastery) to Islamabad (Quarry ravine)

Walking distance 15 km - Walking time 6 hours

Transport is needed to take you to the starting point and pick-up arrangements must be made at the Islamabad side of the hills.

Drive 5.7 km along the Museum road beyond the museum where a narrow asphalt road turns to the right. A sign directs you to the archeological site of the Jaulian Monastery (it is just opposite a PSO petrol station). Follow the road to the end: the walk starts at an aqueduct which carries irrigation water from the Khanpur lake.

The well-used trail under the aqueduct eventually turns to the left, passing a village (Barwar). You will notice a few water ponds along the trail. Beside the larger one there are remains of a cut-stone cistern. Continue uphill across a low saddle into the valley towards the village of Tarmakki. A second village can be seen right in front across a river bed (Garamthun), however, at an intersection at the far end of Tarmakki, turn to the right and follow the well marked trail.

After approximately 30 minutes you will pass three large evergreens (on the left, across the streambed) and then slightly further on go down to your left into the streambed. Follow the bed upstream, past a village (Sabra) with a concrete water tank on your left; beyond the village the track leaves the streambed (on the right). Follow the trail in the same direction towards Kot Jandan. At the highest point of this trail there is a small pond. From here you will see in the distance the so-called 'Lone Tree Hill' (the tree was still there early 1992). After going down and passing a dry streambed, the track starts to climb again and just before the

Hike B-13: from Taxila to Islamabad (Quarry valley).

highest point (a small saddle) take a trail which runs sharply to the right. Follow this trail uphill. Eventually the trail becomes a well marked footpath which encircles a valley and ends up at the Big Boulder Pass. From there the easiest, but not the most beautiful way to go down is through the Quarry valley. The valley is completely spoilt by numerous limestone quarries.

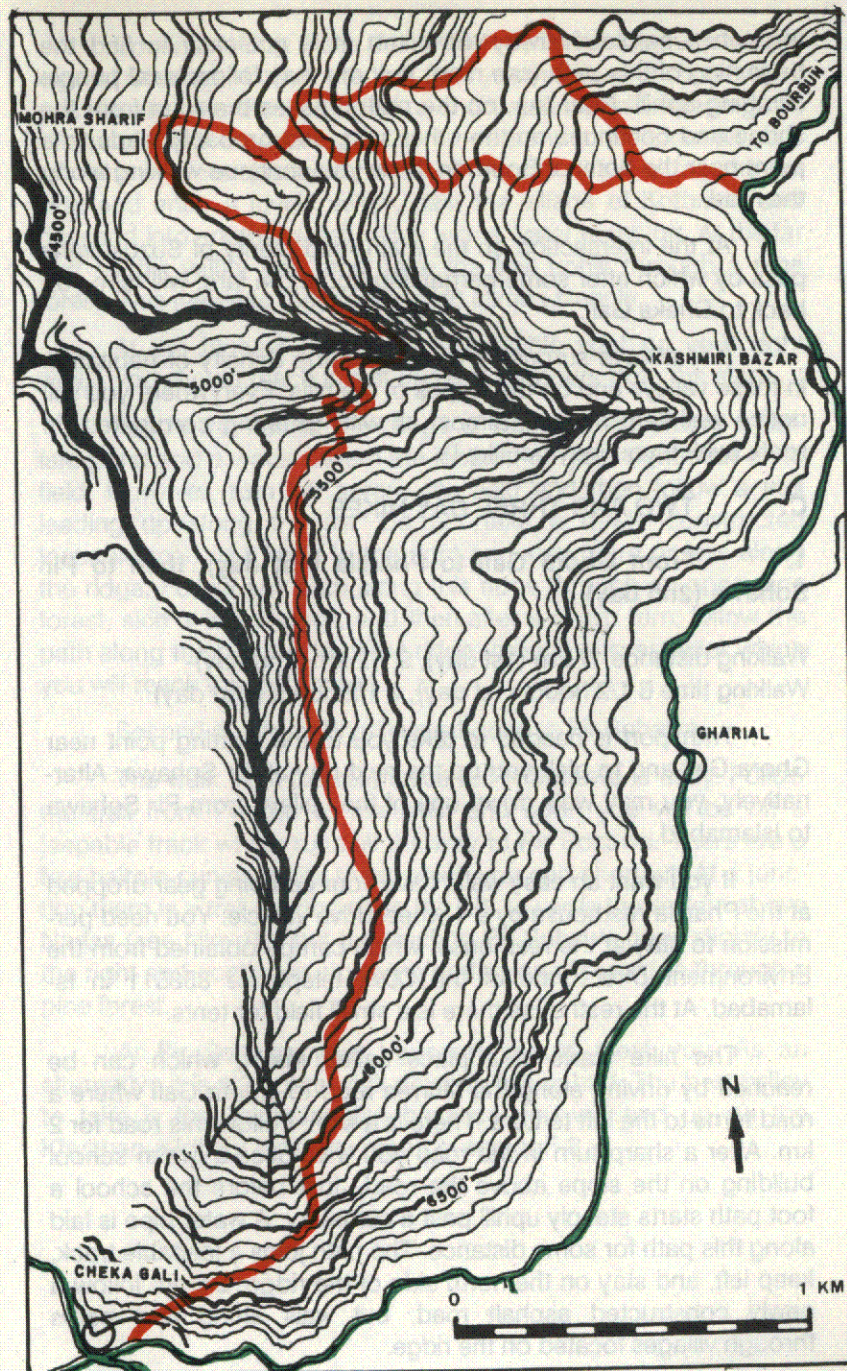
At the entrance of the valley there are a number of teastalls where your transport should be waiting for you. If you have no transport you can easily find a taxi or Suzuki.

14. From Cheka Gali to Mohra Sharif, to Kashmiri Bazaar road

Walking distance 6 1/2 km - Walking time 1 1/2 hours to Mohra Sharif, then 1 hour to the road

Drive to the road junction at Cheka Gali, which can be reached by following the road from Sunny Bank towards Kohala and then to the Cheka Gali junction indicated by a signpost: left 'Bourbon' and straight on 'Kohala'.

Park your car at Cheka Gali and walk along the Bourbon road for a hundred or so meters, first through a curve to the right and then to a left curve across a nullah. At this point you will see on the left below the road a trail disappearing into the pine forest. Follow this trail which is well marked with flat stones along its edges for about an hour after which you'll reach the first houses of a village. Go down the trail, leaving these house on your right, but eventually you will loose the trail near the village school. Follow any footpath in the same direction but try not to loose elevation. From here you will be able to see the shrine of Mohra Sharif in the distance on the other side of a valley which you have to cross. The valley itself is seriously eroded without much vegetation ('badland erosion'). Cross the valley and stream at a convenient point and continue on the other side along a narrow trail which eventually leads between a few houses and fields to the shrine.

The shrine consists of three or four tombs and several mosques. There are a number of teastalls at the beginning of the road which goes uphill to the Kashmiri Bazaar road. Walking along this road to the main road will take you about an hour. There exists also a nice footpath going uphill which passes

Hike B-14: from Cheka Gali to Mohra Sharif.

through a hamlet halfway the climb. It is not easy to find the beginning of this path (see map) but you may follow local people climbing uphill. Near the top the path crosses the road from the shrine and continues on the other side, and probably leads to a point near the hotel of Bourbon. Now you continue walking along the road.

At the intersection on the main road plenty of Suzuki vans pass by which after some bargaining about the fare, will take you back to Cheka Gali.

It is always surprising to observe the density of habitation in these valleys and on the slopes of the hills. Everywhere you will notice well-kept houses, almost all with glittering corrugated tin roofs (which you may not like !).

C. TWO AND THREE DAY HIKES

1. From Ghora Gali to Pharilla (1st day), then to Pir Sohawa (2nd day)

Walking distance 17 km (1st day), 9 1/2 km (2nd day)-
Walking time 6 1/2 hours (1st day), 2 1/2 hours (2nd day)

Transport is needed to take you to the starting point near Ghora Gali and to pick you up the next day at Pir Sohawa. Alternatively, you may walk down one of the valleys from Pir Sohawa to Islamabad.

If you want an easy walk, have your camping gear dropped at the Pharilla resthouse by a 4-wheel drive vehicle. You need permission to stay at the resthouse, which can be obtained from the Environment Directorate of the CDA, telephone 858511 in Islamabad. At the resthouse there is a small field for tents.

The hike starts at a place called Malot, which can be reached by driving along the Murree road to Ghora Gali where a road turns to the left to Lora. There is a sign. Follow this road for 2 km. After a sharp turn in the road you will notice a green school building on the slope above the road. Just before the school a foot path starts steeply uphill past a cemetary. A water pipe is laid along this path for some distance. The path joins a jeepable track, keep left, and stay on the north side of the ridge. Do not follow a newly constructed asphalt road, but walk along foot paths through villages located on the ridge.

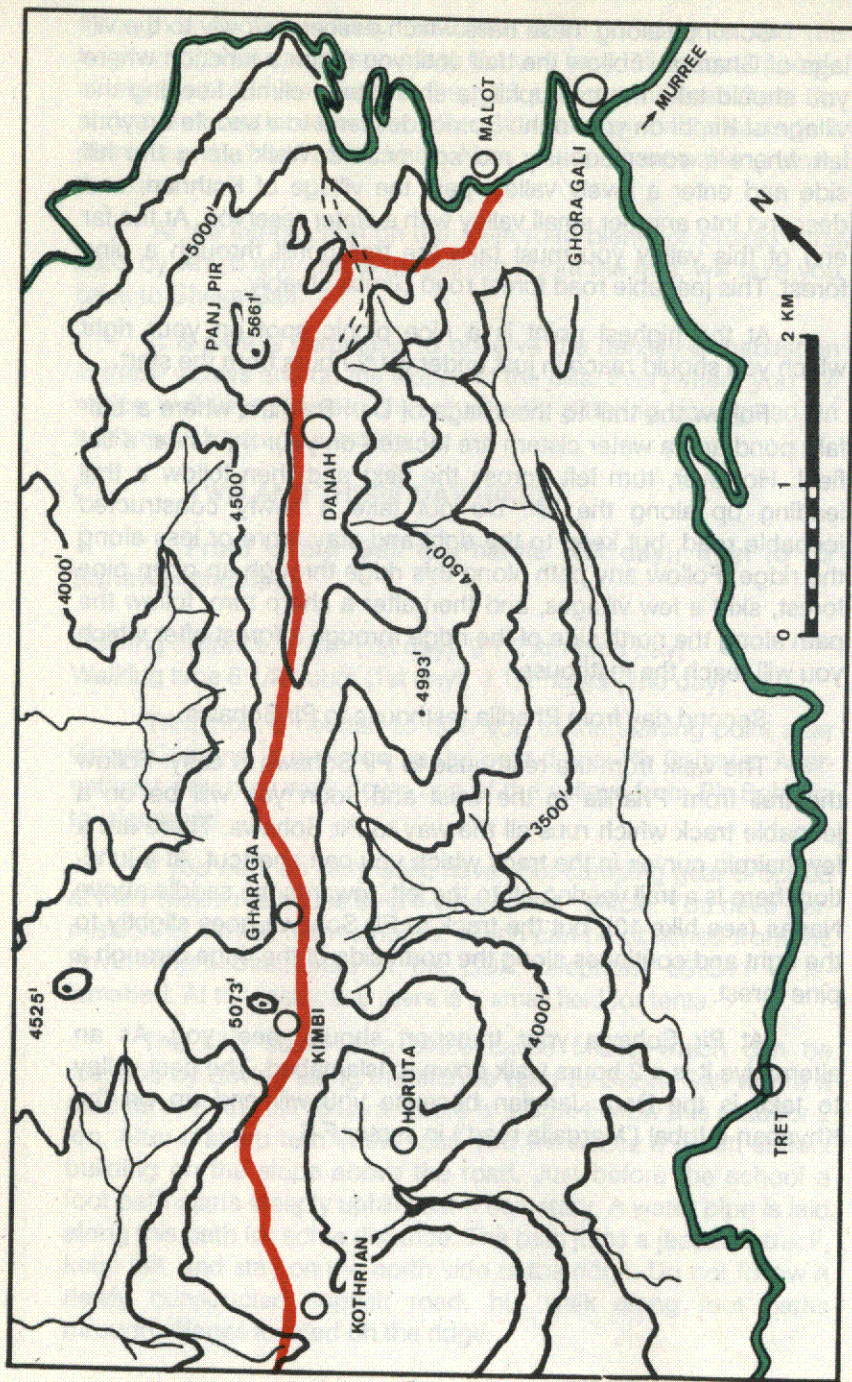
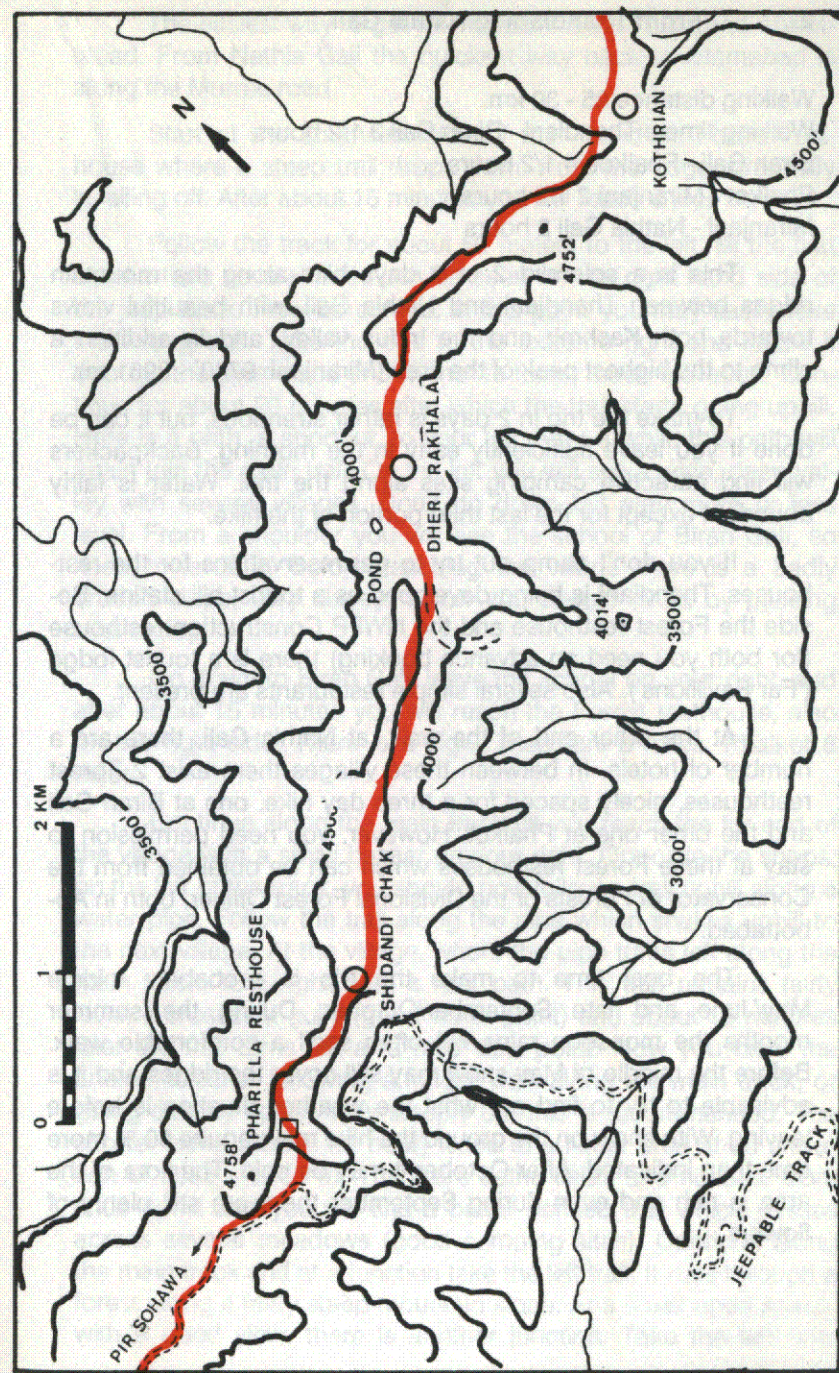
Continue along these trails which descend slowly to the village of Gharaga. Follow the trail until you reach a junction where you should take the trail uphill, a short steep climb, keeping the village of Kimbi on your right. Do not descend to a saddle on your left where a conspicuously red soil occurs. Walk along the hill side and enter a lovely valley, past the village of Kothrian, and descend into another small valley with a water reservoir. At the far end of this valley you must take the trail uphill through a pine forest. This jeepable road forest road climbs steeply.

At the highest point is a nice picnic spot on your right which you should reach in just under 3 1/2 hours from the start.

Follow the trail to the village of Deri Rakhala where a buffalo pond and a water cistern are located on your right near a flat field. However, turn left across the field and then follow a trail leading up along the hill. Do not take a newly constructed jeepable road, but keep to the right and stay more or less along the ridge. Follow any path along this ridge through an open pine forest, skirt a few villages, and then after a sharp turn, follow the path along the north side of the ridge through a forest after which you will reach the resthouse.

Second day from Pharilla resthouse to Pir Sohawa.

The walk from the resthouse to Pir Sohawa is easy. Follow the trail from Pharilla to the west and soon you will be on a jeepable track which runs all the way to Pir Sohawa. There are a few hairpin curves in the track which you can shortcut. At a junction there is a trail veering off to the left, towards the saddle above Narias (see hike 10), but the track to Pir Sohawa goes slightly to the right and continues along the north side of the ridge through a pine forest.

At Pir Sohawa your transport should meet you. As an alternative it is a 2 hours walk down to Islamabad. The best valley to take is the Dara Janglan because you will end up on the Khyaban-e-Iqbal ('Margalla road') in sector F-6.

Hike C-1: from Ghora Gali to Pharilla resthouse (map 1).

Hike C-1: from Ghora Gali to Pharilla resthouse (map 2).

2. From Thandiani to Nathia Gali

Walking distance 25 - 30 km
Walking times: Thandiani - Biran Gali 3 1/2 hours
Biran Gali - Phalkot 4 1/2 hours
Phalkot - Miranjani 2 1/2 hours
Miranjani - Nathia Gali 2 hours

This is a splendid 2 or 3 days hike along the mountain ridges between Thandiani and Nathia Gali, with beautiful views towards both Kashmir and the Indus valley, and in addition a climb to the highest peak of the area (Miranjani: 9780' - 2981 m).

To make the trip in 2 days is rather strenuous, but it can be done if you leave sufficiently early in the morning. Backpackers will find attractive camping sites along the trail. Water is fairly abundant except for the last third portion of the hike.

If you don't camp out try to get reservations for the rest-houses. Thandiani is being developed as a tourist hill station. Beside the Forest resthouse and the NWFP Construction resthouse (for both you need an advance booking) there is a tourist lodge ('Far Pavillions'). Also several simple restaurants are present.

At the other end of the walk, at Nathia Gali, there are a number of hotels. In between these villages there exist 2 Forest resthouses, nicely spaced for a three day hike, one at Biran Gali and the other one at Phalkot. However, you need permission to stay at these Forest resthouses which can be obtained from the Conservator of Forests or the Divisional Forest Officer, both in Abbottabad.

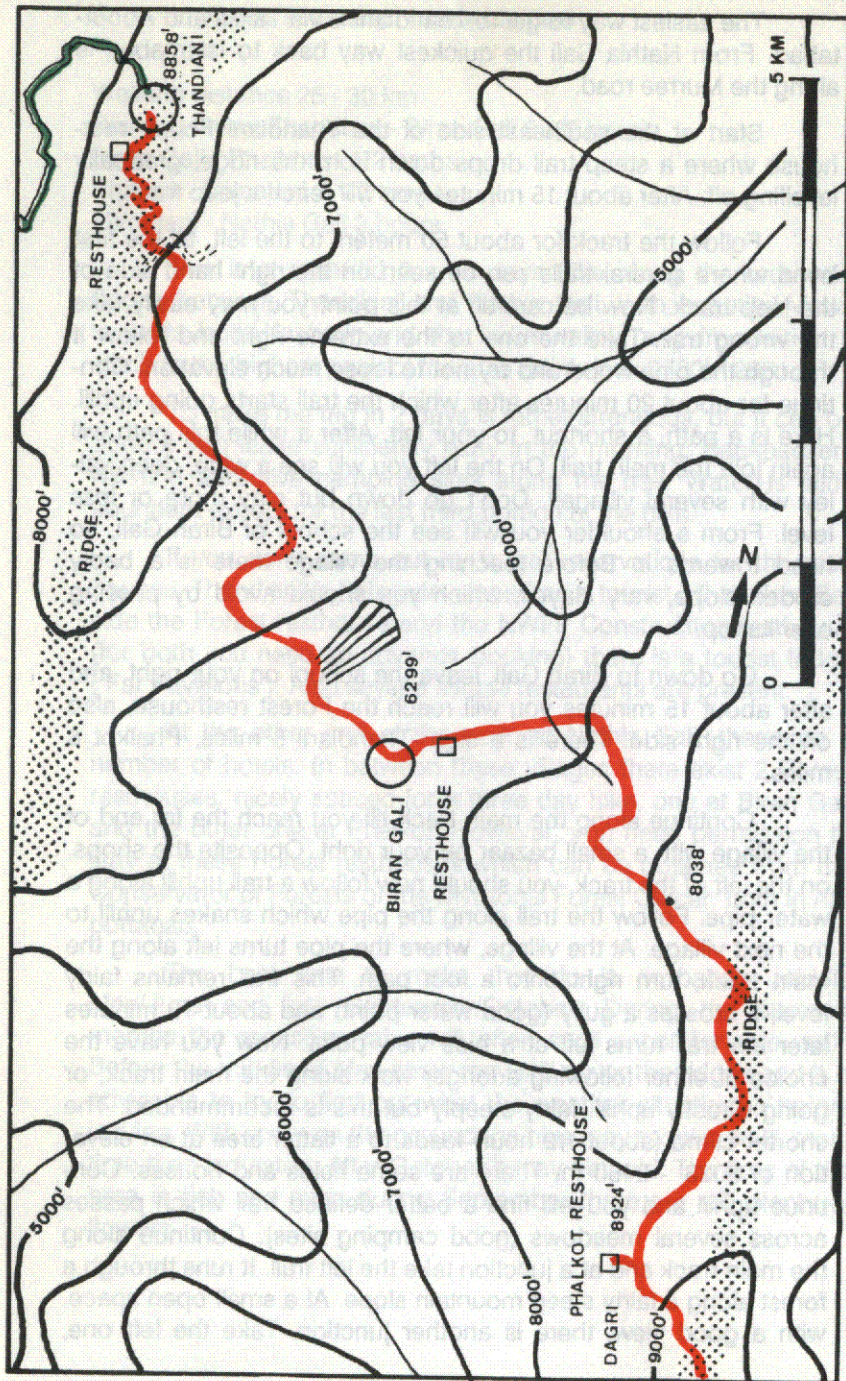
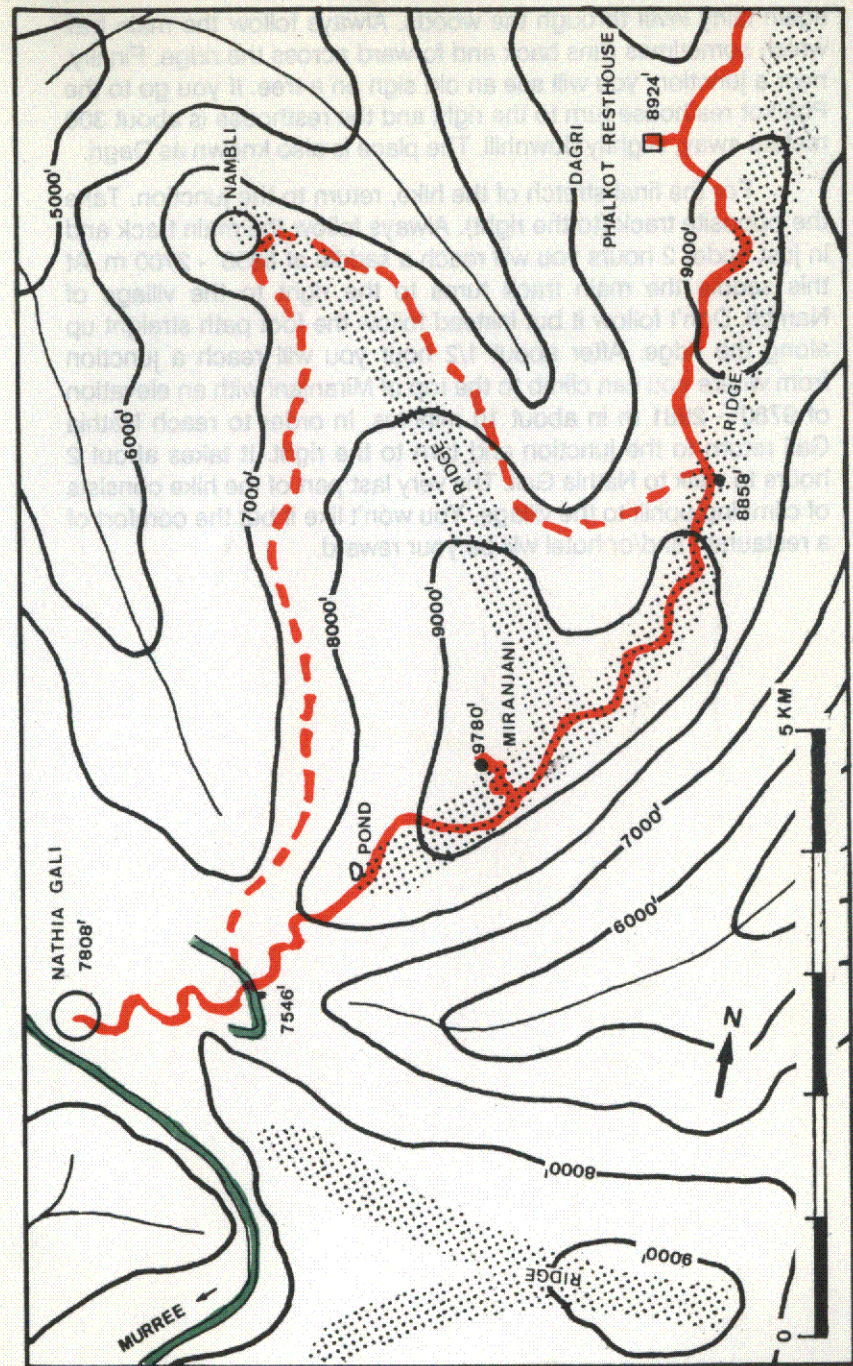
The best time to make the trip is probabaly middle May/June and late September/October. During the summer months the monsoon rains will often spoil a comfortable walk. Before the middle of May snow may still cover the ridges and it is advisable to try to find out what the weather situation is before leaving. With snow on the ground the hike may require 50 % more time than indicated. After October it may be cold. The flora of the area is rich and even during September there are still plenty of flowers.

The easiest way to get to Thandiani is via Taxila and Abbottabad. From Nathia Gali the quickest way back to Islamabad is along the Murree road.

Start at the southeast side of the Thandiani Forest rest-house where a steep trail drops down from the ridge, gradually levelling off. After about 15 minutes you will reach a jeep track.

Follow the track for about 50 meters to the left, till the first bend where several trails can be seen on the right hand side of the jeep track. Now be careful: at this point you may easily take the wrong trail. Take the one to the extreme right and follow it through the pine wood and try not to loose much elevation. Continue for about 20 minutes after which the trail starts going uphill. Here is a path, a shortcut, to your left. After a while this path will again join the main trail. On the left you will see a wide, deep valley with several villages. Don't go down but stay more or less level. From a shoulder you will see the school of Biran Gali, so head towards it. Before reaching the village there is a badly eroded slope, very clayey, which you should avoid by passing over its top.

Go down to Biran Gali, leave the school on your right, and after about 15 minutes you will reach the Forest resthouse, also on the right side. There is a sign: Thandiani 8 miles, Phalkot 8 miles.

Continue along the main track till you reach the far end of the village with a small bazaar on your right. Opposite the shops, on the left of the track, you should now follow a trail uphill along a water pipe. Follow the trail along the pipe which snakes uphill to the next village. At the village, where the pipe turns left along the main track, turn right onto a foot path. This trail remains fairly level, it crosses a gully (good water point) and about 10 minutes later the trail turns left at a nice view point. Now you have the choice of either following a longer walk along the main track, or going directly uphill, fairly steeply but this is recommended. The shorter climb (about 1/2 hour) leads to a flatter area at an elevation of 8038' - 2450 m. There are some fields and houses. Continue uphill and you will find a better defined trail which passes across several meadows (good camping sites). Continue along the main track and at a junction take the left trail. It runs through a forest along a fairly steep mountain slope. At a small open space, with a good view, there is another junction. Take the left one,

Hike C-2: from Thandiani to Nathia Gali (map 1).

Hike C-2: from Thandiani to Nathia Gali (map 2).

again fairly level through the woods. Always follow the main trail which sometimes runs back and forward across the ridge, Finally, near a junction, you will see an old sign on a tree. If you go to the Phalkot resthouse turn to the right and the resthouse is about 300 meters away, slightly downhill. The place is also known as Dagri.

For the final stretch of the hike, return to the junction. Take the opposite track (to the right). Always follow the main track and in just under 2 hours you will reach a saddle at 8858' - 2700 m. At this saddle the main track turns to the right to the village of Nambli. Don't follow it but instead follow the foot path straight up along the ridge. After about 1/2 hour you will reach a junction from where you can climb to the top of Miranjani with an elevation of 9780' - 2981 m in about 10 minutes. In order to reach Nathia Gali return to the junction and turn to the right. It takes about 2 hours to walk to Nathia Gali. The very last part of the hike consists of climbing uphill to the village. You won't like it but the comfort of a restaurant and/or hotel will be your reward.